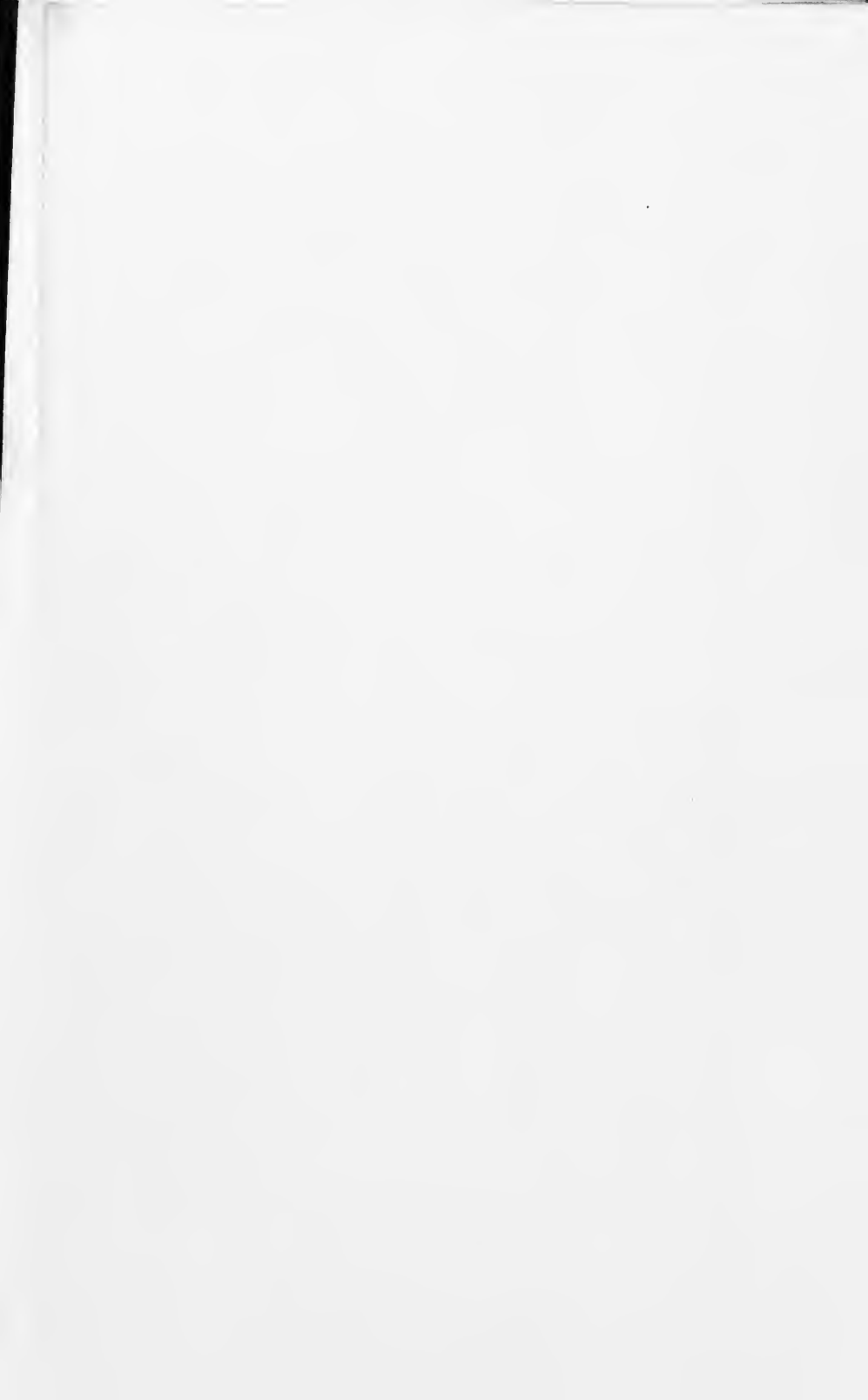


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IN COLORS OF THE WEST

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BY
GLENN WARD DRESBACH



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TO MARY

Many of the poems included in this volume have appeared in *Poetry*, *A Magazine of Verse*, *The Midland*, *The Smart Set*, *Contemporary Verse*, *The Measure*, *All's Well*, *Everybody's*, *Romance*, *The Lyric West*, *Ainslee's*, *Munsey's*, and *Life* and the author thanks them for permission to republish.

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IN WESTERN MOUNTAINS

IN WESTERN MOUNTAINS

I

He stood a moment at the edge
Of that cliff, looking out with me
Upon great valleys ending in the haze,
And mountains that from hazes drove a wedge
Of snow in skies of lapis lazuli.
Then something of the littleness of days
His life could span came to him dizzily
And he, who boasted of his might with men,
Turned back and grasped a little cedar tree
Nearby, for safety and he shut his eyes,
Shaken, and would not turn to look again. . . .
Back from that cliff-edge jutting out to skies
He climbed and spoke at last with heavy breath,
“God, what a place! What is it? Life or Death?”

II

Our words seemed much in vain.
How many Ages helped those heights attain
Such silence in the sun,
O silent One? . . .

He threw a stone, upon the crest,
At some dwarfed bush he made his mark.
A gray bird fluttered from her nest
With startled cries,

IN WESTERN MOUNTAINS

A lizard from the sun flashed to the dark
Of veins in rock then turned its beady eyes
To look at us as if it wondered why
A fool should mar such comfort near the sky.

The stone was cast as small boys throw
White pebbles on smooth pools as if to see
In troubled surface where faint circles go
Some action that to alien minds may show
More kinship to their own reality.

III

Faint jingle of little bells
And the half-heard shuffle of feet,
High up on the mountain side,
Crept down through the waves of heat,
And a gray thread wove through the wide
Tapestry of the mountain side.

The burro train came down
With the ores men take apart
As the treasure they love the best
From the multitudinous heart
Of mountain—but all I could see
Was a gray thread through a tapestry.

IV

From a deep couch of sun
I raised myself and, blinking, lay
Watching the colors melt and run
From golds and purples to the wan
Fantastic streets of Babylon.
Pale flowers in hanging gardens swayed

IN WESTERN MOUNTAINS

Out to a haze of amethyst—
Ah, God, what vows of hearts were made?
What lips were kissed?
Near me a stir—and one by one
The lizards crept back to the sun.
I felt a sudden touch
Of creeping chill—
A lizard crawled upon my hand, no more
Afraid of it because it was so still
And warm in sun, as much
A part of things as stones although it bore,
Unknown to lizards, power to crush and kill. . . .

What warmth and power am I, too, resting on!
Be kind, O Hand, that crushed mad Babylon!

V

Up there I wondered if but yesterday
I cursed the little things that barred my way
To quick desires . . .
There, through years of fires
From summer suns and ashes blown
From burned-out winter moons, that cedar clings
To sheer rock—alone—
Groping here with a root and there with one,
Asserting its right to stand up in the sun
Or face the storm's hurled shock . . .
And, since it was not left to grow where run
Sweet juices of rich earth, it grows—in rock!

SONGS AND LYRICS

BROKEN MUSIC

There come so many strains of broken music
From lives that dreamed to make a symphony,
But something in them makes my heart remember
The music of the restless, troubled sea.

There come to me so many half-heard whispers
From loves that now the last great word have said,
But something in them makes my heart grow troubled
As in a woodland when the leaves are dead.

AN OLD WOOD IN SPRING

The wood was so old that I thought
To hear it saying its prayers
In its aisles like cloisters wrought,
But I came on it, unawares,
Chuckling like old men mellow grown
Talking of Youth on a hill alone.

A ROAD SONG

"Good morning," I said to the woman,
And her weary voice replied,
"Good morning," as if to the flowers
In the basket at her side—
I said to her, "Sell me some flowers."
She said, "They're for one who died."

And I met a small boy followed
By a dog that seemed content
To wag his tail like a banner
Wherever the small boy went.
"Sell me the dog?" I questioned.
Said the boy, "He's not worth a cent."

And far on the road this morning
If any one may try
To buy my dreams I will answer,
"There were things I could not buy."
There's a wind in the new leaves stirring,
There's a call and a faint reply.

And out on the road that's only
A road because men went
Over a path so often,
If any one comes intent
To buy my dreams I will answer,
"To you they're not worth a cent!"

A DESERT WILLOW

The smallest breeze can waken
 A rapture in these leaves,
A few bright raindrops seem a shower,
 As if this tree believes
So much in things it wants to be
It works its will mysteriously.

And here no brooklet's mirror
 Can show the tree how fair
It stands. At roots the hidden waters
 Moisten sands and there
The whispers quicken musically
From waters dreaming toward the sea.

The farthest star can brighten
 These branches, half a moon
Give glory, and this little willow
 Makes a desert's June—
As if it knew such things should be
No greater than its imagery.

AUGUST NOON

Lost fairy ships at anchor
On streams of daytime sleep
Are all the water-lilies
Where weary waters creep.

Even a thrush sits silent
Where reeds begin to die. . . .
A hawk seems caged, uncaring,
In one hot bit of sky.

Oh, what has gone from summer
Here where I walk alone? . . .
Something that goes from loving
When all of Love is known.

THE LEAVES ON THE SCRUB OAK

The leaves on the scrub oak are dying
And flocks of birds are flying farther south.
A purple haze is heavy in the distance . . .
The frost will kill what lasts beyond the drouth.

So many words were said, yet still unanswered
Are all the deeper questions—put aside—
How fit it is that in this weary season
My dreams have flown from you, my love has died!

I shall not stay to hear the oak leaves rattle
Across the gray sand—reaches now so dry—
Ah, I shall turn to you and break my silence
With futile words, and smile and say good-by.

MIRAGE

Above the heat-waves breaking
On hazy shores that seem
To grow from faded purple
And golds all spent of gleam
Is spread a desert's dream.

Above the sands and ridges
Barren and hard and dry,
A haunting beauty fashions
Its magic in the sky
Where no birds now go by.

A little lake is rippled
By winds not reaching here,
And trees of slender beauty
On low shores linger near
The waters strangely clear . . .

Unreal, a thing of vision,
Empty as is the air!
Beauty bred of delusion,
Mirage, but oh, how fair
Above sands old and bare!

Above the barren places
Of days when nothing seems
Sure of the quest it follows—
Of far-off trees and streams
Send Mirage, O my Dreams!

I GAVE YOU MOODS

I gave you moods of white sails passing
From vision on a lonely sea—
Then, touched with longing for a moment,
Your hands reached out and clung to me.
Can you be content with nearness
When the distance still must be? . . .

I gave you whispers from the longing
Of the winds in desert lands,
Then, afraid of something spoken
Over shadow-patterned sands,
How you groped to me in twilight
With your ineffectual hands!

I gave you songs of mountain waters,
Of moonlight on an empty plain,
Of rain on roofs forever haunted,
Of undersongs in driven rain—
Your eyes grew troubled and, in silence
You crept into my arms again.

I HAVE ALWAYS SAID I WOULD GO

I have always said I would go sometime in the autumn
 Away from the bare boughs and the fallen leaves,
Away from the lonely sounds and the faded colors,
 And all the ancient sorrow, and change that grieves.

I have always said I would go—and now it's autumn—
 To an island where the wild hibiscus grows
And parakeets flock to the groves at twilight
 And fragrance drifts from bays where moonlight glows.

But there would be the vasty sound of breakers
 Come in to toss their pearls upon the sand.
All through the night—a longing of great waters
 Trying to make the vastness understand.

I have always said I would go sometime in the autumn
 Away from the lonely sounds and change that grieves—
But here in my heart is the sound of a distant ocean
 And here in my heart is the sound of these falling leaves.

AN AUTUMN WOOD

An autumn wood upon a hill
Against the sunset stands so still
In distance that I only guess
How leaves drift down and softly press
Against the fragrant earth in sleep,
How voices of the wood grow deep
With some new meaning in that flare
Of beauty fading, drifting there.
The mingled golds and crimsons run
From woodland into setting sun.
The wood's hazed grays and jaspers fuse
With sunset's vaster pinks and blues.
A gold leaf blown a little way
Sees gold cloud-ships drift down a bay
Of rainbow fires that very soon
Will turn to pale seas of the moon—
And past cloud-ships with ghostly spars
The frosted spray will turn to stars . . .
Oh, could I meet death so at last
With beauty answering a vast
Of beauty, I would then be still
In autumn wood upon a hill.

MEADOW BROOK

Sway of the young corn growing, growing,
Smell of the wind from the pastures blowing,
Then willows listening to a song
Of a meadow brook between them flowing!
I shall not stay to listen long
For fear I get the wistful air
Of willows listening, and care
Too much for what the brook is saying
Down through water-lilies playing
Like fairies dangling pearly toes
While the water comes and goes.
I shall turn and look on grasses
Swaying in the wind, and trees,
Stones and grains, for soon with these,
While the water sings and passes,
I shall always have to stay—
No matter what the brook would say . . .
Why do I still linger, waiting,
Touching fingers with the brook,
Looking as the willows look—
While the water through my fingers
Gleams and slips away?

WHICH SHALL I PITY MOST TO-DAY

Which shall I pity most to-day
Of olden April loves?
The one I saw go out to feed
A flock of snowy doves
Beyond her lonely garden-place
With but lost Aprils in her face?

Or shall I pity most the one
I met where crowds went by,
With flash of gems upon her breast
And winter in her eye,
And Master Poodle walking, proud
In place of Love, through April's crowd?

Or shall I pity most the dear,
Strange one who went with Death,
To lose the earth-born rapture gone
As in a rose's breath? . . .
That body gone to dust again
Answer with violets the rain.

SUMMER TO AUTUMN

My leaves of green you will turn to gold and crimson,
My ripened fruits you will give their fullest hue,
And my scattered birds will flock to you at parting—
But all I give in turn will be taken from you.

Your gold and crimson leaves will be banners fallen,
Your flushed fruits will be scattered on the ground,
And, at the last, the birds will hasten southward
And leave you winds and many a lonely sound.

We dream the dream and never reach completion
Within ourselves, then pass in things we give . . .
Always the void of winter wraps in silence
Things that in spite of winter wait and live.

AN AUTUMN ROAD

Down a hill, then up a hill
And then a vast of sea!
A wedge of wild geese crying
Passes over me—
And now my dreams are flying
Where I may never be. . . .

Down a hill and up a hill,
Then level lands again!
Far off the sea is speaking
A longing that is pain—
My eyes are weary seeking
For my lost ship from Spain.

Down a hill and up a hill,
Oh, so long ago,
There was a princess singing—
Where, I do not know. . .
There were arms that, clinging,
Would not let me go.

WISE GAMBLERS

Four old trees stand tall on a hill.
Wind swirls around them, never still,
And their heads together bow and sway
As if in talk of a game they play.
Sometimes they laugh and sometimes sigh,
And there beneath a low gray sky
I've seen them drop their leaves when thins
The gold and crimson, as near dawn
Wise gamblers drop their cards upon
The table, saying kindly, "Why
Quarrel with a game that no one wins!"

THE FRUIT THAT GREW IN EDEN

The fruit that grew in Eden
A later time may be
The sorrow of a dreamer
Who bowed on Calvary.
For trees that grew in Eden
He bowed beneath a tree. . . .

I cannot build an Eden
Of such long-rotted leaves,
I cannot dream the beauty
Of faith that yet believes
In hands that thrust the lances
In One between the thieves.

I build a place of fancy
Of such things as I see,
I keep a faith in something
Till it has lied to me—
The thing that vanquished Eden
Wears down bare Calvary.

OF PLACES AND SEASONS

IN THE DESERT

I

Tumults of silence thunder in my ears.

What land is this with such immensity,
Which keeps lost glory-cities in its skies
Half seen through heat-waves surging dizzily?

Here are the Hanging Gardens in their bloom,
And here the domes of Nineveh and Tyre,
And in this cloud above the glare of sands
Is Rome that sends its glory up in fire.

My eyes ache and I turn them to the ground.

Here is a busy ant hill at my feet;
The ants have worn thin trails through burning sand . . .
They bring their bits of green things through the heat.

And Time that trod the olden cities down
And scattered stones turned dust with dust of kings,
May send a careless foot to ant hills here
And crush the work even of humble things.

II

There's no hiding here in the glare of the desert—
If your coat is sham the sun shines through . . .
Here with the lovely things and the silence
There is no crowd for saving you.

IN THE DESERT

When hearts love here the love lasts longer,
And hate here leaves a heavy scar.
But we, with the desert's beauty of distance,
Are always dreaming of places far.

The tropic seas and the throb of cities,
And harbors filled with the ships we knew.
We keep, with the sun and the stars and silence,
Life—and a promise glimmers through.

If you have come to start a kingdom—
Our eyes looked on Rome and Tyre.
But if you come with dreams for baggage
Sit with us by the cedar fire!

III

When first the love-moon rose above the desert
Lifted from the slime of slow-drained inland seas,
What shape first moved from hillsides to the magic
Of strange lands whispering in symphonies?

Was it a cave-man hungering for beauty,
Wanting his mate? And did he find her soon?
Or was it but a wolf that sitting fearless
Cried out a world-old longing to the moon?

IV

Some day a river may be put in chains,
And held from rendezvous with passionate seas,
To fill these lands with sounds of dancing rains
And songs of ripening grain and flowering trees.

IN THE DESERT

And homes may scatter on these sunbaked sands
Where now long purple shadows spread and fill
Strange empty places . . . One with empty hands
May stand here then and see a desert still.

And one with heart where Love has sent no stream
Of starlight, in some house built then, may bow
Before long purple shadows, lost in dream,
Even as I do now!

V

In the hills to the north of the desert
A little river flows,
But when it comes to the desert
No one sees where it goes—
It creeps into sands and passes
From places sunlight knows.

The fevered skies of the desert
Would drain it thirstily
If it stayed for a year of splendor
Where ages still must be—
But alone it creeps to the darkness
To find the light of the sea.

DESERT SHADOW SONGS

I

The shadow of a cloud moves on the grass
Parched with the fever of the thirsting day,
A filmy coolness drifted from afar
And drifted soon away—
Promise of rain that fails, how soon to pass
Where deeper shadows are.
So on my brow what shadow-hands have passed
And left an olden fever to the last. . . .

O land of hot winds and dwarfed, wistful tree
And all veiled mysteries of amethyst and blue,
My shadow falls on you,
Your shadows fall on me.

II

I would not have my Love be here
In shadowed silence lest she see
My shadow more than me and fear
Within my arms again to be—
For fear her son and mine at birth
Would keep such shadows in his eyes,
Too much a part of long gray earth,
O God, too hurt, too quickly wise!

DESERT SHADOW SONGS

III

Across the heated level of the sand
Pale shadows reach from jutting hills
To touch the trees in narrow valley land,
As I have seen
The thin white hands at grimy window sills
Reach out to touch some precious sprig of green
As if the sight of it was not enough—
It was so full of magic stuff—
And only touch could understand.

IV

A trickle of water goes between
Gnashed ridges, in a sandy bed
Wide as a river might have been. . . .
What waters down this course had sped
To distance (and how long ago!)
That this thin stream a lure might know
Out to that vast of shadow-sea
Waving in hazes mockingly.

So from what springs in me must creep
What streams unto what phantom-deep!

RIVER SONGS

I

Here, where the wide, slow-moving river
Shines through the willows winds make songs about,
I hear faint music moving on the waters
Close to the shore, with silence farther out.

I feel there is a deep orchestral music
In that wide brightness always surely bound
Upon its journey—as when in the starlight
I feel star-rhythms, miss celestial sound.

Of all great things and lovely moving onward,
Rivers and dreams that ages long may love,
I tell my heart and yet it still must wonder
How great the urge, how faint the songs thereof!

II

Who knows this river's longing for the sea?
What proud ships and what drifting wrecks it bore?
It sings not of its fevered days of drouth
Or floods whose scars are gray upon the shore.

Yet had you seen the narrow waters crawl
Between the sand-bars when the drouth was here,
Then you would know—and had you seen the floods
Rip down this channel you would think of fear.

RIVER SONGS

Who knows my longing? Who would care to know?
What of the drouth-times and the times of love?
I know not all myself—but I may know
How great the urge, how faint the songs thereof!

IN AN OLD WOODLAND

I

Once I walked this woodland in the springtime
And the musk of grasses drifted on the air;
Scents of early flowers and a dewy freshness
Of the leaves then met me roaming everywhere . . .
Beauty-haunted, passion-wakened,
Then I looked into my heart and found old longing there.

Longing that must linger when the slender beauty
And the lure of passion in things no hands may hold
Lift from earth that, too, is in the body,
Here I felt in springtime . . . Now the leaves are gold.
Wistful-voiced and music-haunted
Winds and trees have whispered things a springtime left untold.

Once I walked this woodland in the springtime,
Looked through it to distance smiling in the sky . . .
Everything seemed happy, sure of fair completion—
Not a single bloom or leaf but had more joy than I.
Love-awakened, beauty-chastened,
Now I hold you close and tell of love that shall not die!

Now I know what thrushes in this woodland
Sang above the whispers of the leaves that stirred,
Now, when leaves are dying and the blooms are faded,
Leaves and blooms are in my heart grown wise as any bird.

IN AN OLD WOODLAND

Lyric-throated, fearless-eyed,
Love has spoken something now that only gods have heard!

II

I am one who has seen
The leaves dying, the leaves falling . . .
In the nights I have heard
The trees sighing, the winds calling . . .
I know my life must be
Kin to the life of a tree.
I know my dreams of green
And silver, quickly stirred,
Must fall as leaves.
I know not how . . .
I am young now,
But in my youth there is an age that grieves—
I am one who has seen
The leaves falling, the leaves blowing . . .
What after Love and Dream?
Nothing worth knowing—
Save my strength from the grass,
Greeting new loves and dreams that pass,
In tingling roots and flowers growing.

III

Restless, through the woodland where the breath of summer
Left a passing fragrance, with the winds we go
 Haunted by the whispers
 Of a glory fading,
Seeking for an answer we may never know,
Fever-eyed and wistful-hearted in the afterglow. . . .

IN AN OLD WOODLAND

Passing where my love-songs in violets were written,
Where your youthful passion, with unbroken will,
Silver leaves had spoken
With an olden music,
Now we find the violets gone, and leaves are never still—
Broken music, beauty-haunted, whispers on the hill.

Lingering in the woodland where the gold is fading.
Where the leaves are dancing, in death, to wind's commands,
Lift your eyes, Belovèd,
That the skies be brighter,
Laugh again, that music thrill these stricken lands—
Why this silent groping and these clinging hands?

IN PORTO BELLO BAY

The ghost-ships waken with the moon
 In Porto Bello Bay,
And many an olden pirate tune,
Still drunken with remembered June,
 Trails through the mist away.
The sails are spread, the faint lights gleam,
 The ships move to the seas
As if they seek the ports of dream
 Beyond the Caribbees.

The moon has spilled upon the bay
 Her cup of silver wine.
The galleons turn against the tide
Their shadow-prows; their ancient pride
 Speaks in each shadow-line.
The glamor of their time returns;
 Purged of their sin they seem—
Each seeks the port for which it yearns,
 Borne on the winds of dream.

And in the hold of each is gold
 And down in every one
Are gems that came from jungles deep
Where flowers flame and ages keep
 The rituals of the sun.
And every sailor-shape that stirs
 Looks yearning out to sea
Beyond the mist, and no mist blurs
 His eyes of memory.

IN PORTO BELLO BAY

One sees a running girl come down
 A street where flowers grow,
One sees a little laughing lad,
In colors of the rainbow clad,
 Wave welcome, all aglow.
All see the gladness they had seen
 Before there came a day
When anchors held from what had been—
 In Porto Bello Bay. . . .

Before the moon creeps down to sleep
 She calls the ghost-ships home
To harbors deep the years have made
Of purple silence and of jade
 And flecks of silver foam,
And with their memories they ride
 The daylight hours away,
Unseen, unmoved by any tide,
 In Porto Bello Bay.

WHILE THE POLLEN DRIFTS

I

A bee has groped from the heart of a flower.
The bloom is faded, the sweets are thinned,
But the bee is drunk with its wine and passion
And his wings move dreamily on the wind.

His wings are laden with dust that's golden,
And so, unknowing, he plays a part—
For his want helps work the will of the pollen
As he creeps to another flower's heart.

There is a power luring and urging
All through the dream and growth of things . . .
There's failure and fading—and still a glory
Dusting its pollen on restless wings.

II

Old Simon's drunk on cider.
He's buzzing like the bees,
Swaying down into the town
Grinning at the trees—
Caring not who sees.

For hours he was sitting
Beside the cider mill—
Tried to sleep, then had to weep

WHILE THE POLLEN DRIFTS

Much against his will,
On the swaying hill.

He felt the Autumn turning
Her saddened eyes his way . . .
Alone and old and strangely cold
He had no words to say—
Ragged now and gray.

Now Simon's drunk on cider,
As busy as a bee—
He'll tell in town how he marched down
With Sherman to the sea,
And so made men be free.

III

Old Miranda sees him
Swaying into town—
Poor gray ancient lover
Silly as a clown,
Turned away because she thought
Jason wore a crown.

Old Miranda snivels,
Lonely as can be,
Watching Simon passing
Bowing to each tree,
Longs to give a home to him,
And end their misery.

Pollen, drifting, drifting,
Lost on barren ground!
Old Miranda shivers

WHILE THE POLLEN DRIFTS

Looking all around . . .
Faded asters in the wind
Make a ghostly sound.

IV

There'll be a moon to-night
And winds across the grass
And many crickets chirping shrill
Along the way we pass.

And where the pollen went
All day we may not know—
For there will be our clinging arms . . .
We shall not turn and go!

We shall not look again
Into each other's eyes
As often we have looked before
With an alert surprise.

V

I come from the fields and wooded places
And roads that started where dawn began,
And ended in colors that left but traces
Where molten golds of sunset ran . . .
And I have looked in the quiet faces
Of flowers, when summer was nearly done,
Lifting still in the wind and the sun . . .
There are many words that I would say
But only these shall I speak to-day—
Here in the twilight under the eaves:
When shadows were longer and pastures shorn,
And corn-stalks were stronger to hold the corn,

WHILE THE POLLEN DRIFTS

And Beauty was hardened and colors were thinned
And blooms were worn, and dulled were the leaves,
I have seen the pollen drift on the wind—
And kept a thought that my heart believes!

THE GAME-PANAMA

“Señor, you win—but we have broken laws
Of this fair city by the sea,
And since you win it’s fair you lose because
I, as a guardian of the Law, must be
No longer gamester but Alcalde sworn
To duty . . . Let me see, Señor—
A thousand pesos! It had seemed much more
Piled on the table there across from me—
And gaming time so near the smile of Morn!
You are a stranger here, you say,
And I shall be as lenient as I may—
A thousand pesos—that your fine will be!”

“But, say—Alcalde—you invited me—
And you have broken, too,
The rules of this your city . . . Who will place
A fine on you?”

“Ah, there are gowns of lace
And silk that I must buy to win her smile,
And little silver slippers for the dance,
And rings that she’ll grow tired of afterwhile . . .
She’ll stab my heart with coldness of her glance!
It’s all a game, Señor . . . Your fine
Is easy since it is so quickly made,
But mine, ah, mine
How long it must be paid!”

THE HILL ROAD

“Ah, Señorita, tell me where you go
With orchid and hibiscus in your hand
And all the morning in your face aglow.”

“Señor, I go
Along this path to that hushed bit of land
Where is my first love’s grave, and flowers grow
By trees that stir with winds strayed in from sea
And in the winds the sweet lush grasses blow
Their whispers gracefully.”

“But why your smiles and flowers in your hair?”

“But, ah, Señor, another lover there
Waits now to weep with me!”

WHILE THE PRAIRIE WHISPERS

I

The maple leaves are golden;
They are falling one by one,
And down blue-misted hollows
There is the flight of swallows
Glinting toward the sun.

Along the lane where wild grapes
Hang purple in the morn,
A farmer asks his neighbor
Upon their way to labor,
"What's the price of corn?"

And leaves about me whisper,
"The price one has to pay!"
And winds toss leaves asunder
Down lanes I walk and wonder
The price of dreams to-day.

II

Her white dress glimmered in the rising moon . . .
The orchard wall seemed very cruel and cold
As she leaned there one lonely night in June—
Sixteen years old!

WHILE THE PRAIRIE WHISPERS

She dreamed of cities that she had not seen
And had them rather changed from what they are,
Until she thought she hated shadowy green
And staring star.

Then suddenly the cities faded out—
It was not them she wanted after all . . .
Her first real lover, coming as in doubt,
Paused at the wall.

The boldness of her dreams so quickly dead,
She lost the glamour of the things she knew
In cities far. . . . She blushed a bit, and said,
Why, howdy do!"

IN THE DARK OF THE MOON

I

They said, "Death is a sleep and a forgetting,
A rest and dream after Life's songs and sighs."
I only know Death touched her lips to silence
And took sunlight and starlight from her eyes.

I only know Death chilled her lovely body,
And that we laid it in the earth one day.
Was that the end? Only dreams hear her singing,
Only dreams hear her footsteps far away.

Oh, once I felt that I had learned the secret—
A rose grew from the earth where she was laid,
And in the dark I knew it by its fragrance—
Strange longings and old dreams within me strayed.

But now the rose has died. The spell is broken.
To-night the sky, without a moon, is blind . . .
Only the tall soft grasses nod and whisper,
Whisper and nod here in the restless wind.

II

The road is dark. No hills, no trees
Lift from the levels of the dark.
The high things and the low things are
As one, and each familiar mark

IN THE DARK OF THE MOON

That I have known to guide my way
Is hidden. I alone remain
Upon the road, and shall not stay
To meet the coming dash of rain. . . .
But do I move, or does my will,
Heavy with dark and mysteries
Stand leveled with the hills and trees,
While Darkness moves and I am still?

III

To-night in cities glare the lights—
There morning comes too soon.
The people there at work or play
Forget about the moon!

Oh, I shall leave these desert hills
Where darkness levels things,
And walk again the streets and give
My heart some tinsel wings.

And I shall look in lovely eyes,
And dance to many a tune—
Till on a night my heart shall ache
For silence and the moon!

SONNETS

A MOUNTAIN LAKE

Mirror of skies whose cloud-ships on your breast
Arrive at havens of the mirrored trees,
About you lift the splendors of the West,
Across you move the olden mysteries
Of light and shadow. Fed by melted snows
Forever flashing on the changeless range
Haloed by fleecy clouds, you find repose
In beauty living changeless through the change
Of seasons and of ages. One by one
They see reflected growth and slow decline
Upon your surface, chronicles of sun,
Of shadow and of moon. Cedar and pine
And mountain flower look on you as I—
Meeting in you at last with peaks and sky.

THE CHRONICLE OF DUST

There is a chronicle of dust that keeps
Such things as often crowded day forgets—
Here is a page written in violets,
And here a page where the arbutus creeps.
Out of long silence and the hidden deeps
What love, what beauty, without vain regrets,
Lifts to the spring again when dust begets
New forms for them while earth their magic reaps?

Such love as gave new meaning to the moon,
Such beauty as made spring come back again!
They are not lost in the tempestuous years. . . .
O dust, that saves to give immortal June,
What fragrances from Héloïse remain?
And to what glory blossomed Juliet's tears?

HAZY WEATHER

The circle is contracted and the sky
Draws down to earth. Far hills are shut away
In hazy silence and the dried leaves play
A restless melody as winds go by.
A smoky fragrance drifts, as if the dry
And broken blooms of summer on this day
Again have flamed—but now on pyres grown gray—
To speak in perfumes till they, too, must die.

What shall the spring remember of this time,
When from the earth the offspring of these blooms
Lift to the dancing magic of the rain?
Bright leaves once more will scrawl a silver rhyme
Upon blue distance—while from hidden tombs
Come lives I live again and yet again!

FROSTY MEADOWS

For me, there is a mood of friendliness
In frosty meadows in the early sun.
The sense of things frost-killed cannot repress
An exultation that awakes to run
Along still brightness spreading out for me
Like softly fallen dust of stars, akin
Somehow to magic on a morning sea
Or distances from hills when mists grow thin.

So it may be when I look out across
Death-widened distance and may see no more
Life's flaming colors and no more feel loss
Of things that once a warmer radiance bore.
And see, like frosty meadows through clear air,
Dear lands—forget I ever suffered there!

CUTTING WEEDS

When he was twelve years old he cut the weeds
Along the fences where the cornfields swayed
In hot, slow-moving winds and, working, played
His scythe was turned a sword for mighty deeds.
He felt the might of conflict; met his needs
For great adventures with the thoughts that strayed
Like pageants through his mind, and he was made
The hero loved of ladies, knights, and steeds.

What ill winds blew that mist of dreams away? . . .
Grown into manhood now he swings his blade
With dogged, steady strokes along the fence.
He thinks, perhaps, of gold the corn will pay—
Is restless, vaguely troubled, half afraid
Of wishes haunting him with imminence.

AN APRIL MOON

Such laughter awakens, in the leaves to-night,
As stirs like music in a heart that hears
Despite all sounds of long-defeated years.
And not a ghost from memory has might
To hush one leaf or dull one path of light
In this revival of earth's dream that nears
Completion in reality . . . Appears
The ancient wonder that is still our right.

What branch was broken in the wintry blow?
The new leaves wave their banners in its stead.
What flower-seeds were prisoned by a stone?
The frail stalks lift a senseless weight, to grow.
And here vines creep to one tree scarred and dead
And but for them how bare, how much alone!

BEAUTY IN THE RUINS

A beauty speaks from ruins of old walls,
Once high and beautiful, in some design
Yet lifting from the dust, some lovely line
Unbroken where a flood of sunlight falls.
The structural splendors past, each stone recalls
Some glory of the whole, and we divine
In it a touch of mastery where twine
The vines of ivy and slow shadow crawls.

Because of what it was before it fell
To ruin we may see in ruin still
A certain grandeur long in balance hung
Above the dust, and come to know how well
Romance and wonder have again their will
When some old men begin, "When I was young!"

MOTHS AND LIGHTS

What puzzles me, regarding moths and lights,
Is that no moth, in forests threshed or stilled,
Is crushed of wing or by insistence killed
For seeking starlight in the lovely nights,
But starts toward death the instant that it sights
A lantern's flame, and for a moment thrilled
Must die with some desire unfulfilled,
A symbol scorned by other futile flights.

And I am sad for things that cannot choose
Between the starlight and a lantern's flame,
And sad for choice of sorrows as they are:
To gain the lantern's flame and then to lose
The life from which desire for it came,
To seek the star—and never reach the star!

THE PROCESS

I know a slope-bound valley held between
Two hillsides in a semi-desert land,
And rains, that seldom come, had washed the sand
Of those gray hills upon the bit of green
The valley lifted when I first had seen
Its wistfulness. I saw its grasses stand
Half-buried, as if for a reprimand
From those stern slopes where weathered boulders lean.

An old man looked upon the place with me.
“First, sand,” he said, “is washed from hills like these,
Then richer stuff goes down there soon or late;
Then gulches open and some earth will be
Washed farther on—but all the finest trees
Grow in such places, though it’s long to wait.”

VIGNETTES FROM LIFE

THE FEEL OF SILK

"At last I have it," whispered Kate, "at last,"
And spread the dark blue silk upon her knees,
Touched it with loving fingers as she bowed
Above its brightness . . .

From another room
A weak voice called her and Kate placed the silk
Gently upon the table and replied,
"Coming, my dear."

"What is it, Jane?" she asked
As she went in and stood beside the bed.
"My lungs hurt, Kate," then coughing shook the girl
So thin and white upon the bed. Blood showed
Upon her lips, then rushed from them, and Kate
Ran for the doctor, sobbing as she went.

"This is the third in three days, and the worst,"
The doctor said when he had come. "Perhaps
She may pull through this time . . . Her heart is weak . . .
She may not last till morning."

From the sleep
In which Jane fell she did not wake again.

Five years had passed since Kate had brought the girl
To this small mountain town, and Kate had taught
The school and worked alone with hopefulness
Upon her plain face. Just a month before
Jane died they found that they had saved enough

THE FEEL OF SILK

That Kate could buy a new dress.

“Jane,” she cried,

“I love the feel of silk. At last I’ll get
A silk dress and if you don’t care I’ll go
To Jason’s dance next month.”

Her sister’s eyes

Were very wistful, but she said, “Of course
You must go, Kate. You’ll look so fine in silk.”
And later on she said, “If Jason King
Could see you dressed right, not another girl
About this place would have a chance with him.”
And Kate had laughed . . . “You silly child!” she said.

Then came the silk dress—and that very night
Jane died, and when they buried her the few
Who came remarked how pretty she had been
In that blue silk . . .

THE NEEDLE'S EYE

Neither a woman nor a man long poor
And humble, used to taking things that come,
With wealth thrust quickly in worn hands, can pass
Into the Kingdom of the Rich—no more
Than camels can pass through the needle's eye . . .

Josiah had been told, with doubting eyes,
That he was worth a million dollars. Then
He put away his hammer and his saw
And went to see the oil well on his land
That had been worthless for so many years
Of aching toil, and with him went his wife
In bright new calico, too awed to speak.

They saw the source of this strange wealth that came
From ground that failed to give good crops, but still
They could not understand all that it meant . . .
Upon the way home through the heated dust
Josiah told his wife that she could have
What she had wanted, and they talked about
The fine hotel that they would build in town
When they had sold the plain board rooming-house
That for a year had driven want away,
When men rushed to the little town to drill
For oil . . .

Now in that little town it's told
How old Josiah laid his tools away

THE NEEDLE'S EYE

And took no care for odd jobs waiting him,
And then grew restless when a crew of men
Began to build his fine hotel—and charmed
With wages higher than his dreams had known,
He went to work upon his own hotel
For day's pay and, while working overtime
For further profit, died . . .

And it is told
How his old wife, with eyes that hid their tears,
When the hotel was finished took a room
That was the cheapest, and kept on at work
About the place in utter loneliness.
With only one extravagance in all
The years she lived: Josiah's picture there,
Enlarged and framed in gold, beside her bed.

A DEEPER SPRING

The curtains of the haze, like amethyst
Long faded in the glare of sun, were hung
On all sides in the distance. Two men moved
Among the heat-waves surging low across
Pale yellow sands . . . At last one fell and clutched
The hot sand, while the other turned to look
And sagged there like a half-filled sack of grain
Left stand alone. He helped the other rise
And blood came from the movement of his lips
Burned in the glare. He mumbled, "There's a spring
Among the rocks—before us—half a mile."
Again they stumbled on across the sands. . . .

Two weeks before the older man, it's said,
Had boasted of a worthless mine he found
To sell the young man lately from the East
With much more money than was good for him.
The deal half closed, they started out to see
The mine that huddled in a nest of rocks
Across a stretch of bad lands, and prepared
For comfort on the way. Their burro train
Was loaded well with food and water-bags.
The older man had winked before he left
And told his friends he took along a drop
To help his scheme . . .

From ridges and scrub oaks
Their journey led them down upon a waste

A DEEPER SPRING

Of sand where cactus grew and hot winds hurled
Themselves in fevered haste across the flats.
Then came the sandstorm snarling in the dark.
The burros lost, the two men started out,
When winds had quieted, to find a spring.

Now slow as shadows on the yellow sands
They crept to that low ridge of rocks that held
The hope of water. Nearly dead from thirst
They crawled about when they had reached the place.
The tepid water came in drops between
Rust colored rocks.

“There’s not enough for one,”
The older man was mumbling, “Drink . . . I’ll go
To find a deeper spring.”

The one who stayed
To drink has told it since with troubled eyes.

NEW WALLS

Stooped after years of leaning over books
Where long neat columns showed another's gain,
And with the look of some old ledger piled
Upon a shelf for future reference,
Old John went shuffling home in wistful haste
To tell his wife that he had bought the land
Where they would build their cottage—out beyond
The shadow of high walls . . . And they could build
The little house they planned and, from a life
Of saving, still have left enough to keep
Them safe if he could work a few more years—
And now he was but sixty years of age
And she was fifty nine . . .

That night they sat
Upon the small porch of their rented house
Walled in by higher houses that shut out
The view and kept away the stir of breeze
To bless a sultry night. Said John to her,
“It seems we’ve always been walled in . . . Out there
We’ll have the open and a bit of breeze.”
His small pale wife smiled, wistful as a child . . .

They built the plain white cottage on the lot
Beyond the shadow of the city's walls,
And lived in it a year before again
The shadows of the walls fell over them.
Upon the right a high apartment house

NEW WALLS

Shut out the view of willows by a stream.
Said John, "We still can see the green fields there
Upon our left."

The old ones looked and sighed . . .

Another month and on the left grew up
A great stone house. The city had begun
To spread, in earnest, to the open spot.
Walled in on both sides soon, the cottage stood
With view shut off and breezes turned from it.
The view in front was street and little trees
That had not quite decided how to grow.
The bit of romance that the open gave
The little place was gone . . .

Said John one night,
"I feel more natural now, walled in. New walls
Have found us here . . . Just walls and walls and walls
Since I remember!"

And he would have wept
But that he knew his wife would weep with him.

GIFTS

A Poorhouse is just that and little more—
And people in glass houses would forget
Such irritating evidences left
Of Man's decline and fall, but such a place
May sometimes house some beauty of its own.

In Compton on a hillside stilled with snow
Old John, so deaf he heard but shouted words,
And gray old Henry, stone-blind, lived to greet
Another Christmas Eve, and in a room
Old John was reading from the only book
He had—a tale of knights and ladies fair,
While Henry played an old forgotten tune
On his mouth-organ treasured very long—
So long it squeaked with age in many keys.

A sour-faced old woman passed them there
And snarled, "A Merry Christmas."

Henry stopped
His tune and John looked up but did not hear.

"What say?" said John. Then Henry shouted out,
"She said 'A Merry Christmas,' to us, John."

And for awhile the old men said no more.

They had been close friends for a year, and now
Each thought what he could give the other one.

GIFTS

Thought John, "This book is all I have to give.
I'd like to keep it, too. It's good to read."
And Henry thought, "I've not a gift for John
But this mouth-organ, and I'd miss it so."

At last John said, "I have a book for you,
And, Henry, since you cannot see I'll read
Your book to you to-morrow. That is all
That I can give you—since I've nothing else."

And Henry said, "John, all I have to give
Is this mouth-organ and it's old as sin,
But when to-morrow comes I'll play it close
Beside your ear so you can catch the tune.
I know you'll like it. . . . Let me feel the book."

And John said, "Henry, play a bit—close up."

Next day the old men had a merry time
Together with their gifts—each having his
And that he gave and something else beside
Although they could not put it into words.

THE CROW'S NEST

The crow's nest is not built to please the wren.
And Luke's rough house stood high upon a hill
Where pines in distance were like bristling hairs
Upon a giant's head grown nearly bald.
It was not liked by Sarah in her house
So small and trim near birches where the lands
Sloped to the valley. When she saw the hill
Each day she saw Luke's house and frowned at it
And said, "It's like a crow's nest," to herself. . . .
These two were married there two years before
And parted—and were stubborn as the hills.

It is a lonely land among the hills—
The crows flew over and the circling hawks
And stirred the place as unexpected crowds
May rouse a country store. . . . Luke lived alone
With his great dog, because his folks had lived
In that same place before him, tilled the land
And took what grew. And Sarah lived alone
In her prim house because her folks had lived
In it before her. . . . Then one windy night,
For all her stubborn pride, the loneliness
Was more than she could bear. She would not go
To Luke and ask forgiveness, would not leave
Her house for his without a good excuse.
So desperate was her love, so much in need,
She thought, "I'll burn this place. No other's near . . .
He cannot turn me out into the hills."

THE CROW'S NEST

And so she fired the house she loved—and Luke
Came down to help her fight the flames. No house
But his was near, and so, at last, they went
Into the crow's nest. Luke pushed back a door
And went ahead of her. He kicked aside
A pile of grass and rags that he had placed
Along a wall, and Sarah asked, "What's that?"
He growled, "A place I meant the dog to sleep."
And Sarah laughed, "That grass burns fine. I *know*!"
And Luke, though shame-faced, laughed with her at last,
Although she said, "We might have had the sense
To keep the better house since one's enough!"

LONGER POEMS

WILD APPLES

I

The frost, still heavy on the lowlands, won
A radiance soon melted in the sun
That gave it, and the river took the lost
Quick splendor that had faded with the frost.
Then Malcolm looked a moment as in doubt
Across the river and the fields about
Touched with the glory that would be the death
Of their rich season, then with quicker breath
He left the road and followed down a lane
Leading to uplands bright above the plain.
His free stride rustled dead leaves as he went
Along the hill-path . . . To him came the scent
Of wild grapes heavy with their sweetness still
Ungathered in the brambles on the hill
Except by birds in flocks that now and then
Arose near him and settled down again.
In one place opened eastward on the slope
He looked far back and saw the hazes grope
Above the city he had left behind,
Like ghosts arising from a troubled mind.
And as he watched he thought how he had seen
Long columns moving while shells burst between
Scarred ridges and the stricken woods, how smoke
Thickened and thinned and thickened there to choke
Parched throats of men, and all seemed near him still.
Frowning, he turned and hastened up the hill,
And on its crest looked down with eyes half blind

WILD APPLES

With tears upon the place he came to find . . .
Below him stood the cabin in the trees.
The orchard, sweet with its old mysteries
Of blooms that faded, fruit that came to pass
Ungathered always in the matted grass,
Now greeted him with but one definite sound
Of ripened apples falling to the ground.

II

The moods of war, a feeling of defeat
In victory has sent him back to meet
The conquest of a city and its stress
Of endless mimic wars, and bitterness
And sense of some great nameless loss had grown
Until he felt he fought the world alone
For something that could never quite repay
The hopes it killed, the youth it took away.
And Malcolm's wife, a woman made of stuff
Of strange confusions, did not care enough
For more than superficial things to give
An understanding that his love might live.
Her early gifts on careless comers spent,
She gave her later gifts of discontent,
And he grew disillusioned of the one
Who gave so little and so soon was done . . .
First, her unbounded youth had lit the fire
Of his quick love and passionate desire,
And, seeing then in her no other thing
To love, he loved that near to worshiping
As was his nature . . . He who sought a mate
Was still unmated, hurt, insatiate,
Through years of work to meet a definite end
For dreams that lingered with him to befriend,

WILD APPLES

For his desires, hoping vainly still
To shape life and a woman to his will
Of beauty and true art, and failing that
He grew less lover and more diplomat.
His wife, resentful that he grew away
From her while she was with him day by day,
As some tree grows in sun and leaves a vine
Still at its trunk and lower boughs to twine,
Gave up the arts that made his love commence
Its conquest, and by dull indifference
Defeated her own ends, and soon or late
Found each new turn a new doubt could create.
Malcolm at last sought what she could not give
And sometimes found it, but he came to live
Between a sense of duties and desires,
Torn in two strifes and burned between two fires,
And, overwrought and weary, came to blame
His wife more than for causes he could name.
And she insisted he was wrong, she right,
Keeping in hateful words a keen delight.

By day he worked, by night he wrote to find
If life's expression eased a troubled mind,
And saw his art in competition win
The notice virtue gains where there is sin.
And still at night his wife could fill a need
Of his much-hungered heart, and strangely freed
From strange misgivings and the old unrest
He kissed her still lips, crushed her to his breast
With such a passion as would leave her cold
And weary later like a woman old—
Then he would sense her mood and turn away
Resenting it, with nothing more to say.
And so it was when War cried loud for men

WILD APPLES

He gave his savings of hard years and then
Left her in comfort while he went, half glad,
To join the conflict of a world gone mad . . .
The moods of war, a feeling of defeat
In victory had sent him back to meet
Vain conquest of the life, again, with her
To whom his duty bound him . . . In the blur
Of maddened colors Life spread out for him
A vast that sickened, awed, while still was dim
The vision that he followed—and it kept
So little that was beautiful. He wept
Alone sometimes while in another room
His wife was sleeping soundly . . . In the gloom
Another's lips seemed near, another's hands
Seemed touching him—one loved in other lands
And more his mate than one who held him still
Against his love, against his better will.
Between a sense of duties and desires,
Torn in two strifes and burned between two fires,
He tossed at night and toiled by day to save
Himself and one who took and nothing gave.

III

One night he dreamed of winds in orchard trees,
Of fragrance from ripe fruit, and sound of bees
Among the grasses. He remembered then
A place he left and had not seen again
Since one sweet summer, now so long ago.
He tramped the uplands. There awoke a glow
And magic in all things he visioned there—
Spun bright in contrast to his dull despair.
“I'll go to find that place again and rest,”
He told himself . . . Much longer than he guessed

WILD APPLES

The habit of his work held like a chain,
Misgivings walked like ghosts and hurt his brain
And heart in shadowed places where his wife
Now hurled the darts of her embittered life.

Men called him genius and she called him fool
Because she could not understand the rule
Of Life in him, his vision of the whole
Beyond her vision of a little soul
In things that groped in darkness. But she made
The most of his success and in it played
A part of splendor while he paid the cost . . .
She took it as her right for things she lost! . . .

Discouraged past endurance he could see
No further cause for bearing misery
Of life with her and work that seemed in vain
For all he most desired to attain,
And so he gave her most he wrung from years,
No more held back by blame or by her tears,
And left her to her own devices . . . Then
He started out to heal his heart again
In that old orchard place a grandsire won
From woodland years ago and left the sun
To care for it when richer ventures led
Away from it . . . Now Malcolm saw the red
And gold of ripened fruit upon the trees,
And from the crest went down among the bees
In waving grasses. Smaller trees had grown
Beside the old trees left so long alone.
He pulled an apple from a bending bough
And ate of it . . . There was a tartness now
And winery richness in this fruit that grew
Smaller and brighter than the fruit he knew

WILD APPLES

When in his boyhood there he ate his fill.
"These are wild apples now," he said . . . A still
Strange mood came over him as all around
He heard the apples falling to the ground,
Visioned the changing seasons there, the range
Of growth and slow decay in all the change.
A longing came to find a woman there
With sun-kissed cheeks and fragrance in her hair
Like ripe wild apples, with a warmth and glow
Upon her lips and in her eyes. The slow
Soft shadows started creeping from the wood
Beyond the orchard land while Malcolm stood
In thought . . . He hastened to the cabin door
And opened it and laid aside his store
Of things his knapsack held. A smell of mold
Was in the room and, feeling worn and cold,
He gathered wood to fill the fireplace,
And settled back with warm glow on his face
As twigs were lighted. Mice crept out to see
And, spell-bound, sat in corners silently.

Late in the night while Malcolm read beside
The fireplace a storm came up and cried
Among the branches and the leaves were blown
About the cabin and chill rains were thrown
In gusts along the woodlands . . . Still the sound
Of ripened apples falling to the ground
Came in hushed moments of the storm. He tried
To read for comfort . . . Suddenly outside
He heard the sound of running feet come near.
Some one had reached the door and he could hear
The heavy breathing and the fumbling hand —
And, while he was at loss to understand
A presence there, he opened wide the door.

WILD APPLES

Chilled winds rushed in with rain across the floor,
Blew out his lantern's light and left the place
In firelight—and so he saw her face.
Her drenched hair hung jet-black, about her brow
Like white blooms touched with starlight on a bough.
Her eyes were dark, her lips were full and red
As ripe wild apples, and she raised her head
And looked at Malcolm in the firelight,
Smiling a little even in her fright.
She tried to rearrange her clinging dress
That showed the lithe curves of her loveliness . . .

"I'm glad to see you," Malcolm said. "I guess
You're some lost angel of the wilderness."
"You're kind," she said. Her young voice held the tone
Of slender trees winds will not leave alone
On stormy hillsides. "But the truth is less
Than kindness," she went on. A bitterness
Was in the words and Malcolm wondered all
That troubled her, and watched the rise and fall
Of her full breast still chilled with driven rain.
She said, "A year in college is not good
For one whose days are shadowed in the wood,
But worse for one in empty glare. A plain
Is past this hill-land, and I've crept away
From farms sometimes by night, sometimes by day
And wandering, I cared not where, I found
This old deserted orchard with its sound
Of mysteries and bees, and lingered here
For hours to dream . . . To me the place is dear—
And so to-night I fled to it to save
Myself from bondage and a life that gave
Only despair."

Said Malcolm, "Such a cause

WILD APPLES

Has sent me here before you."

In the pause
That followed he reached out his arms. She went
Half shyly, and with eyes of wonderment
Looked up into his face, then pressed the warm
Full sweetness of her lips to his . . . The storm
Howled over them . . . A beating at the door
Hurled them apart. Then she went as before
And stood beside the fireplace. She said,
"He's followed me."

And then she bowed her head
Upon her arms.

"Who?" whispered Malcolm then.
"A man I hate," she answered . . . Came again
The rain of blows upon the door.

"Who's there?"
Cried Malcolm standing with the fading glare
Of firelight upon his clenched hands.

"Me
That has a right to be here where I be,"
A loud voice answered. "Open this here lock
(Again the panels trembled with the shock)
And leave me in."

And Malcolm opened wide
The door and met the rush of one outside,
Closing the door behind him with a crash
As he struck out. The other in a dash
Of fury came at him, and Malcolm sent
Him reeling with a lucky blow that went
Straight to the jaw. The heavy form then sprawled
In mud and dead leaves and with effort crawled
On hands and knees a moment as he tried
To rise again.

"Damn you," the hoarse voice cried,

WILD APPLES

"I'll kill you now."

Said Malcolm standing near
With fists in readiness and vision clear,
"Get up and start. I'm waiting."

And the man
Lunged up at him. They grappled and a span
Of grass and mud was milled by heavy feet.
Panting, they struggled grimly in the beat
Of chilling storm, and sweat ran with the rain
Upon their faces twisted with the strain
Of their tense bodies . . . Malcolm found a hold
To his advantage as at last they rolled
Upon the sod, with tangled legs. He drew
The other's head back in a hold he knew
In college days and heard the heavy rasp
Of breath . . . The form grew limp then in his grasp
And Malcolm saw the man had fainted, rose
And, breathing hard, scraped mud from off his clothes.
"Is that enough?" he asked his unknown foe
Who stirred about at last.

"No, damn you, no!"
The other panted. "I'll go home and get
A gun fer you."

Said Malcolm, "Not just yet."
And madder than before he rained his blows
Upon that stubborn head, that fatted nose
And swinish cheek that rubbed against his own
While they had grappled. Heavy as a stone
The head fell back upon the sod once more
And Malcolm dragged the man, pushed back the door
And took him in and bound him with a strap
From off his knapsack.

"Now then, take a nap,"
He growled, and turned to see the girl's wide eyes

WILD APPLES

Full of the firelight and strangely wise,
Upon him as she huddled by the fire.
He turned to her with quickened wild desire
To crush her lips and breast to him, and hold
Her captive in the night now grown so old.
She did not shrink from him as he went near
But raised her arms to him and he could hear
Her quick intake of breath, half sigh, half moan,
As his hot lips were pressed upon her own.
Forgetful of all else they clung there so. . . .
The dark form on the floor threshed to and fro
For freedom, and at last the fire died
So low that only shadows side by side
Clung past his reach, beyond his woe that kept
Its vigil, straining, till, worn out, he wept.

IV

The storm had passed. The dawn came through the trees
With rainbow-colors, and the sound of bees
Was near the cabin. Sunlight crossed the floor
From one wet window. Malcolm stiff and sore
From fighting stretched his aching arms and woke.
The girl beside him smiled. The bound man broke
The silence then.

“Unstrap me and I’ll go,”

He panted out. “I didn’t have no show
With her I guess. She’s wild as hell.”

“All right,”

Said Malcolm. “Hope you had a pleasant night.
But don’t come back . . . Who are you, anyway?”
“What’s that to you?” the other said.

“I’ll say

It isn’t much,” said Malcolm as he took

WILD APPLES

The strap from off the other with a look
Of loathing. Then the other's stiff legs stirred
Out of the door . . . He left without a word.

The girl came up to Malcolm.

"I'll go, too,"

She said, "I am not good enough for you.
I want for something different than I know
But might not keep it if I had a show.
I thought it out last night. I'd only be
More trouble for you . . . He has only me.
I pity him sometimes . . . I'd better go
Before I change my mind. I love you so—
But you would like me just a little while
Like these wild apples here." A weary smile
Came on her face and, running from the door,
She followed him who limped away before.
And Malcolm, watching, heard no more the sound
Of ripened apples falling to the ground.
All fallen in the storm they ended there
The season's offering . . . An old despair
Came over Malcolm, and he gathered things
Into his knapsack . . .

"Something always brings
An end to something else," he mumbled. Then
He slammed the door and started out again
Across the slopes. He saw once more the haze
Above the city and he thought of days
So long to haunt him, and to offer still
The visions sometimes fashioned to his will.

"Life is not well defined," he thought. "It goes
In crazy circles . . . Beauty like the rose
Flashes from it. Wild apples grow and fall

WILD APPLES

In each new Eden . . . I would taste them all—
Forbidden fruit. For I have heard the sound
Of ripened apples falling to the ground. . . .”

Between a sense of duties and desires,
Torn in two strifes and burned between two fires,
He hastened back to Life that could not give
Sure answers to his will to love and live,
Keeping a sense of some futility
In all but visions that his eyes might see.

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

(To Mary)

Carlos was old as Taboga Town
His curio shop was wearing down
In winds and rains that for ages beat
On gray stone walls that touched the street,
On weathered red of the ancient tile
That palm leaves touched, perhaps, for awhile
Before the palm tree grew too tall
Trying to reach the stars that fall . . .
And the stars fall near in the sleepy town
When restless Trades their songs begin
And there's only the sound of the seas come in,
And whispers of one brook going down
To meet the seas, and the monotone
Of palm trees up in the night alone . . .

Carlos said trade could never pay
In Taboga Town, and he slept all day
And talked all night when the moon was bright
If only a stranger cared to stay
Listening there in the candlelight . . .
Elephants carved from ivory,
And things of jade, and artistry
In ebony were in the case,
And a smell like myrrh was in the place.
And a serpent skin and a leopard skin
Hung on the wall in a gorgeous span,

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

Back of Carlos, alert and thin,
By shawls all blossomy with Japan
And scarfs where golden dragons ran.
And a pirate cutlass hung beside
An Indian shawl meant for a bride.
An image of Buddha, shadowy green,
Stood in the candlelight between
The window opened toward the bay
And the head of Carlos, shadowy-gray . . .

The folk in Taboga had said to me,
"Carlos is mad as mad can be.
With heathen idol he talks at night
Of pirate ships and jungle-blight,
And living here a useless life,
He scorns the priest and has no wife.
Even a stranger here can see
Carlos is mad as mad can be."

Carlos brought wine in a flagon old
And from its mouth ran a stream of gold
Into the goblets . . . What Carlos said
(Or was it the wine?) went to my head.
And was it his voice there, after all,
Or words from the palm tree lonely and tall,
Or only the sound of the seas come in,
There in the season when Trades begin,
Or whispers from one brook going down
To meet the seas by the sleepy town?

Carlos sighed, then he said to me.
"You may not think such things can be . . .
I am not the man that here you know,
And one you see not lives with me . . .

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

A life I lived **so** long ago
Is clearer than **dawn** that comes to glow
Upon the sea . . .
There is a fragrance in this room?
It is her garments stirred in gloom,
It is her hands that reach to me.

“Once I was king on a pirate ship
In the Caribbees, on the other side
Of that thread of land a Hand let slip
From looms of Chaos flashing wide.
We took the gold, from many a hold
Of galleons bound for Spain,
And silver bars and gems like stars
For which some men were slain.
One twilight, oh, so long ago,
We won a galleon lumbering slow
In the shadow-seas, and there I found
The life whose circle keeps me bound . . .
I saw her eyes—the stars came then
As they shall never come again.
I saw her hair—the twilight bore
Beauty that I shall see no more.
I saw her breast—the world became
Before my eyes an altar’s flame.
I saw her hands—my heart remains
As when I had torn off her chains . . .
She was an Indian princess, won
By crime, from gardens of the Sun.
Beyond her walls the beasts grew still
To hear her voice that seemed to fill
The airs with music. That I know . . .
Tigers crouching long and low

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

In the grasses could not stir
Out for prey when near to her.

“And I took her, let my men
Take their treasures, and again
Over waters starry-blue
We sailed into our rendezvous,
Miles of shouting winds away,
Now called Porto Bello Bay.
Not a word that I could know
Did my Indian princess say—
But Love sees and understands . . .
There was thanks in touch of hands,
There was faith in eyes that grew
Brave and let her love shine through
At last—so very long ago,
Yet it seems as just to-day.
She was free, yet bound to me
Then by love, but far away
Olden glories, palace rooms,
Gave her longing in the glooms.
And she clung when I would go
Seaward for a golden foe,
Clung and wept and pointed west,
With an idol from her breast
Lifted for my eyes to see.
Then my pirates turned on me,
Took the ship. and sailed away,
Left us to the jungle-night,
And the flaming jungle-day,
Left us there with suns and moons—
And my belt of bright doubloons!
There I had new foes to fight:

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

Crawling vines and twisted things,
Much that grapples, much that clings,
Much that chokes and claws and stings.

“Onward to the shores, but guessed
Through the jungle, to the west
We made progress as a fly
In a spider’s web, and why
The web was broken who can say?
We struggled on and found the way . . .
For the stings the jungle gave
It gave food and drink to save.
Weary, and with garments torn
Into rags, we smiled at morn.
With our flesh pierced there with spears
Jungle-grown, we scorned our fears.
Fever-dew that hung in damps
Was made bright by firefly lamps.
Serpents thick as jungle trees
Looked, and only one of these
Barred our way. My cutlass fell
On the coils of black and green
That, when severed, writhed so well
Yards of jungle were worn clean.
Crimson flower, crystal moon
In the passionate jungle’s June,
And the heavy, throbbing rain—
There was joy and there was pain.
Over fifty miles we passed,
Some by pathways, pirate-made,
Till, upon a hill, at last
We saw the ocean’s blue and jade,
And Panama, an ancient town,
Dreaming where the hill sloped down

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

To a bay where sails were bright.
Under roof we slept that night,
For my belt filled with doubloons,
Bright as early jungle moons,
Bought our way—and no one cared
From what land to land we fared . . .
And next day my bright doubloons
Bought my princess silks the moons
Spun for her, and sandals bright
With some dreamer's lost delight.
And I bought her rings of jade,
Necklaces of sapphires made.
Then, to match her regal air,
Bought myself things men call fair.
Oh, that day of squandering
When I, truly, was a king!

“But no kingdom there was ours—
That old town with flaming flowers
And its palms against the skies,
And its little pomp and pride
Fearing jungle-blight outside
Was not ours . . . My restless eyes
Saw an island past the bay,
But a few bright miles away.
Now it's called Taboga . . . Here
Grew that kingdom for my dear.
Here there grew in jungle-space
Walls of beauty and of grace
And a garden went around.
One brook made a lovely sound
Over stones as smooth as glass.
Long I toiled. Inspired hands
Made my dream—How quickly pass

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

Days the dreamer understands!
And, as if the beauty known
Was too much for two, there came,
In a night of starry flame
Aching with my darling's moan,
One—of our firm flesh and bone,
One—of our great love and dream—
Grew and laughed and in the stream
After golden fishes ran.
Widened circles then began . . .

“Three years, four, (or was it more?)
Passed, and in a breathless night
Came a heaving of the might
In great shoulders underground,
And our island writhed, the sea
Heaved and tossed in agony.
From our falling walls we sped,
Fell upon the shaking land,
Three of us, all hand in hand . . .
Trees crashed down, and overhead
Swords of lightning slashed the sky.
So we waited there to die . . .
From the turmoil rose the sea
Like a wall, and up the beach
Came with madness, hungrily
Took all things within its reach—
But before our bodies passed,
Clinging close until the last,
I saw a great white ship at sea
Sail in as if no storm could be,
And Indian music drifted far
Above its mastlight like a star . . .
I saw three white forms, hers and mine

A NIGHT AT TABOGA

And our small son's, walk on the brine—
Out to that ship!

Our mortal hands
Still clung together, in death, on the sands . . .”

The voice of Carlos did I hear?
The candlelight grew strangely clear . . .
It hurt my eyes and I stumbled down
From the haunted room to the haunted town.
And as I walked the street by the sea,
What soft footsteps passed so near?
What thrilled whispers came to me?

THE WALL OF THE STARS

I

The walls that once protected me
Turned prison walls when I would see
Beyond them, and when I had seen
Something was not as it had seemed . . .
My years were marked with walls between
The things I knew and things I dreamed.
And I shall never quite forget
The first wall where my feet were set
That I might look on something new.
It was a garden wall where grew
The vines that climbed to give their bloom
A vantage ground to spread perfume.
And then at last I found a way
To climb the wall. I watched the play
Of sunlight over it, and thought
How long my childish dreams had spent
My efforts there, that came to naught,
To see forbidden wonderment.
And I was sure that on the side
I had not seen, the lawns were wide
And peacocks strutted in the sun
And fairies danced when day was done.
And then, at last, I climbed and there,
Beyond the wall, was nothing fair
As I had dreamed. There was no sound
Except the murmurings of bees.

THE WALL OF THE STARS

An old man walking through the trees,
With bowed head, did not look around.
With vague distrust and hurt surprise
I left the wall to play a game
That lost its gladness, and my eyes
Could never see the wall the same
As it had been when wonder-wide
They looked—and lost the other side!

II

The wall of green slopes, in a spring
When first I learned how birds could sing,
Next barred me from something I sought.
And I grew troubled then with thought—
Saw violets creep through the wall,
Saw earth-things great and earth-things small
Creep through where fingers of the rain
Had stirred the dust to life again.
I felt the green slopes were a wall
Behind which worked in wonderment
The forces that I could not call
By any name, and discontent
With what I knew of things so fair
Came to me, as in watching there,
I saw stones moved aside by things
So frail it seemed they could not hold
More force than any moth's white wings.
And so the tale of spring was told
Upon the slopes, and summer came
With fuller passion, brighter flame,
And all things found completion, fed
Behind the wall, whereon my head
Had rested, while I heard in trees

THE WALL OF THE STARS

The talk of winds and under these
Whispers that came incessantly,
As if the wall would speak to me
And I could never understand.
Then autumn came upon the land
And scattered on the wall the bloom
And leaf, and in the restless gloom
All lovely things crept back again
Into the wall . . . In chilling rain
I walked the slopes grown gray and bare
And olden sadness in the air
Crept into me. I could not name
The sadness, yet a sadness came.
The dust of things that made me be
Marked seasons of the earth in me!
And still I could not join the things
That crept into the wall, till death
Should still the eagerness of breath
And take the olden sense of wings
And weights from me, then not again
Could I creep out to sun or rain . . .
The earth-wall had, for me, one side—
One while I lived, one when I died!

III

The gray walls housing learning rose
Before me, and the doors were wide—
And strange fear came that they might close
And keep me in a world outside
While others entered there to find
What golden ages left behind . . .
And when I entered there it seemed
I went to hear from men who dreamed

THE WALL OF THE STARS

And sent their dreams in words of fire
To hearts' awakening desire.
I saw worn eyes that looked on youth—
Puzzled with life, men talked of truth!
I knew some souls in travail there
Preached brave desire from despair,
And all who taught, by any rule,
Had yet their own desires to school.
And some who listened caught the flame
Of urges that they could not name,
And some who did not hear a word
To half-unguessed vibrations stirred.
Men told me what had been, not why,
They gave me laws of earth and sky
And atoms free in endless strife—
All that begins and ends in life
That moved like thunder through my dreams.
And then life called to me, it seems,
Above all sounds, and growing less
Wise voices thinned to nothingness,
And turning from vain lore and pride
I left those walls—for walls outside!

IV

The dust-stained walls the city kept
Behind me did not open soon.
I came to disregard the moon.
Mad nights the olden dreams had slept.
I found a world that seemed to care
Only for things that one may wear
Or store in places walled with stone.
And so I lived a life alone
With life, and many dreams I sold

THE WALL OF THE STARS

For gold—and men were mad for gold!
Men hated men, not that one knew
More ways to gladness or could do
Some miracle no bank could hold,
But that there was a store of gold;
And women hated, with a smile,
For what gold bought; and afterwhile
I fought with others for the thing
I saw the city worshipping.
That was a first impression . . . Then
I saw the hungry dreams of men
And women squandering their gold
To keep their hearts from growing old.
And, afterwhile, I saw it all—
The hearts that faced some lofty wall,
The rich, the poor, forever one
Facing the walls till life was done.
And, as I left the city's walls
For land where fresher sunlight falls,
I found a tiller of the soil,
With sweets of earth to breath at toil,
Cursing his fate and all his gods
That hid his wealth among the clods . . .
Over his wall his dreams had told
Of vaster harvests turned to gold!

V

Somehow, I felt that there would be
More glory in the victory!
The walls of mangled earth are there
Before me! In the poisoned air
The shells scream as they carry death.
The fitful wind brings up a breath

THE WALL OF THE STARS

Of rotting pools where blood has dried.
The shattered trees long since have died,
And homes are splinters for the wind.
For miles ahead and miles behind
Are wastes of mud, and hills torn deep
With steel, and wounded woods that heap
Their losses up in twisted piles.
Death plods ahead for tortured miles—
And through it all I lived to face
The mangled earth another place,
Then climbed that wall, and with the rest
Advanced, and when the fight was won
The misted rays of setting sun,
Along the red rim of the west,
Showed still another wall ahead
Grotesque with sprawled shapes of the dead . . .
Somehow, I felt that I would see
More glory in the victory!

VI

And then—when I had looked across
A wall of mountains to the sea
I lost myself, and felt no loss
A moment with immensity . . .
And then my vision cleared to see
Vast waters, past all harbor bars,
Break on the last wall of the stars!

THE THREE DAYS

No matter if the sun is bright
Or if the rain that came at night
Still falls at morning, I arise
From sleep and hardly see the skies
Through windows, for I wake intent
On things that I must do and things
That I have done or hope to do . . .
I feel, sometimes, the lift of wings,
Sometimes the drag of chains, as you
Have felt, perhaps, and to the day
I go, in much the same old way
As I have gone before, to meet
Adventure—victory or defeat.
And for each day that comes to me,
With sun or rain, I live in three—
In yesterday I live to gain
Wisdom to shun what caused me pain,
To seek what caused me joy, and then
See if it may give joy again.
And in to-day I live to do
Things that I must and just a few
Things that I love, perhaps as you!
And in to-morrow, O I live
For all that dreams and life may give—
Or take away—Or take away?
Then is to-morrow as to-day?
And are the days in circle cast? . . .
Perhaps that's so, perhaps that's why

THE THREE DAYS

When time is slow and dreams delay
Beside the spring till it runs dry,
Some hearts creep back to yesterday
To live the only joy they found
In the pattern hard and round . . .
Perhaps that's why some hearts that came
From nowhere yesterday must claim
To-day alone, with the exclusion
Of to-morrow, a delusion . . .

In the circle, round by round,
Laughter echoes, and the sound
Of all sorrows near and far;
Comes the roar and wail of war,
Comes the voice of love, and strife,
Wail of infants finding life,
Come the sound of bits of gold,
Cries for all things bought and sold,
Comes the singing voice of dream,
Noise of wheels and hiss of steam,
Comes the last quick gasp of breath
At the old surprise of death,
Comes the whisper of the leaves
Growing, falling, while there weaves,
Through the pattern green and gray,
Wind that speaks and sighs away . . .
Where the circling ages pass,
Where the new age dreams to be,
Come the whispers of the grass,
Come the voices of the sea . . .
In some yesterday I came
From the flesh that felt the flame
Of my waking, ached with pain
For the world I was to gain,

THE THREE DAYS

Loved me, feeling then in me
A blood-bond's immortality . . .
The flesh is made by God as much
As any white wood of a tree!
I love that flesh that had the touch
Of sun . . . I love my body, much
The same as other mortal forms—
In it the moonlight gropes and fills
Strange places, and the sudden storms
Come in from oceans and from hills,
Come voices that I seem to know
And had forgotten long ago,
Come voices that I had not known
Yet feel somehow they are my own,
Come lives in which I had no part
Until they echoed in my heart,
Comes love, and yearning, and the sense
Of things about, and imminence
Of things I may not touch or see . . .
In each day now I live in three!

I know the language of my kind—
Words from the heart, words from the mind.
These words give everything to me—
From violets to immensity . . .

I know the language of a stream
And the voices of a tree,
Of the half-articulate sea
Mumbling always at its dream.
They are overheard by me,
Talking things of mystery
And of beauty and delight.
Often in the crooning night,

THE THREE DAYS

Sitting lonely near the sky
I have spoken. No reply
Came for me . . . Forever pass
Voices, and the whispering grass
Speaks of things indifferently—
Temples fallen, dust to be,
Bodies stilled for all their trust,
King and wise man in the dust,
Harlot, virgin in the ground,
Thief and dreamer wrapped from sound . . .
Through their dust the roots of things
Grove and feed something that sings—
Leaf or grass—and naught is said
If the flesh be comforted.

Dust, indifferent and cold
To the touch of mortal hands,
But delusion understands
Any rapture you may hold
For the body that must pass.
You are kind to bloom and grass,
You are mother to the tree—
You will be a grave for me!
Only coward, fool or knave
Touched with virtue calls the grave
By such names as I would speak
To my love when on her cheek
Warm blood gives the flesh a bloom
For my kisses . . . In the tomb
Who would bless the earth's perfume?

While I live I'll love the thing
Called the flesh, and flowering
Of the flesh that may be soul

THE THREE DAYS

Or be dream that will not pass
Where the empty seasons roll—
While men move above the grass . . .
From the flesh may come to be
Beauty's immortality
In a new life or a song
That a season sends along
With the new leaves for a tree.

Dust, indifferent and cold,
Take me—spent of dreams and old—
As you will, but I shall be
Indifferent and cold as you,
Chilled in silence through and through . . .
I shall not be in love with you!
While the roots of grass and tree
Shall grope down and take from me
Something for the things that sing,
Something for things whispering,
In the winds above the ground—
In the circle, round by round!

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